

Have you ever felt alone and anxious?

In the story of Elijah from 1 Kings 19,
we see a man who is emotionally, spiritually, and physically drained.
Elijah literally and figuratively
finds himself in the wilderness here,
The irony of the story is that Elijah had just
experienced the greatest success of his life:
He had declared a drought in order to punish
the Israelite nation for its idolatry,
the worship of Baal, which had been encouraged by the queen, Jezebel.

The drought had won a contest between
Elijah and the prophets of Baal.
And although he successfully dispatched the prophets,
Elijah experiences a sense of shame or failure or
some type of emotion that we cannot quite put our finger on.
It leaves him deflated, despondent, and depressed.
Elijah felt alone and anxious. Why?

We are told in the first two verses that Ahab has reported to Jezebel all that Elijah did,

and specifically, that Elijah killed all the prophets with the sword.
Jezebel's response is to send a messenger to Elijah
with a death threat that she vows will be fulfilled in one day.

Now Elijah, very afraid, was running for his life,
fleeing to Beersheba to escape the wrath of Jezebel.

**But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a
solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die, "It is enough (too much); now, O Lord, take
away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors."**

He walks out into the desert and sits down
by a tree like a juniper,
and in a state of spiritual and emotional exhaustion
he now asks God to "just let me die."
Even the prophet Moses,
complained in the wilderness
and asked the Lord if he could die.
His prophetic predecessors also had
heavy burdens they had to bear on their own.
It is evident that Elijah is overwhelmed,
and death is preferable to what he faces,
that he is tasked to do.

**Elijah's struggles with many things,
but nothing more than himself.**

We can all probably recognize how we can be our own worst enemy.

1 Kings 19 clearly demonstrates

Elijah's demons bring him to a standstill.

Elijah has had many triumphs before this event,

and there will be many triumphs to follow.

With all of this in mind, it can be hard to understand
how things went so wrong so quickly for Elijah.

Yet that is part of Elijah's story, just
like it can often be part of our story.

We can often find ourselves most at risk
when we are feeling most invulnerable.

Can you relate to that?

If we were honest, more people than we know have
been exactly where Elijah is at this moment.

But can we be real enough with one another to be that honest?

Feeling deflated, despondent, and depressed.

Alone and anxious. Exhaustion and burnout

are rampant throughout our churches and communities.

People are quitting ministries and pulpits because they are
exhausted and have lost passion for their work.

That is why our Annual Conference has set as one of our five priorities

Clergy and Lay Mental Health and Well-being.

**To explore God's desire for us to flourish spiritually, emotionally, and physically
and consider how we can support one another in the hard work of ministry and life.**

The truth is that life wears down even the best of us.

That might be the place where you find yourself in need of a Stephen Minister or maybe feel
called to help someone by being a Stephen Minister...Tom please explain what Stephen
Ministry is...For you...what is the most important reason the church needs Stephen Ministry?

And sometimes we arrive at these places in life not because of failure,

But even because we didn't manage our success well.

That we never stop.

After making his request,

**5 Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and
said to him, "Get up and eat." 6 He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot
stones and a jar of water. He ate and drank and lay down again.**

God sends unexpected help to Elijah
during his time of vulnerability.
And Elijah is able to overcome his great sadness through
the care of the angels and their nourishment.
This story invites us to see how the Lord
is present to us in difficult moments.
It also invites us to view our problems through a lens
that enables us to see God's divine presence in the world around us.

Just as God is present to Elijah in order
to help him overcome, we must have
the same confidence that God is present
and will be present in our lives.
We must also have the awareness that our
toils and troubles are far from the whole of our story.
Just as God has been present in our past,
we must persevere in the hope that
God will be present in our future.

Elijah had experienced the greatest success of his life;
it had been a victory of all victories.
And immediately following that,
he experienced the deepest valley of burnout and exhaustion.
Part of his restoration first meant getting rest,
which is the significance of sabbath:
It was on the sabbath, following the Creation, when God rested.
Elijah needed rest so that he could hear God clearly.
Then, after Elijah eats and drinks for the first time,
he lies down again, and once again,

7 The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for you."

During this second encounter, the angel explains
the reason why Elijah must eat, "because the way is too much for you."
God knew that Elijah needed food for nourishment.
That's the problem with being fatigued, exhausted:
It hinders our ability, our capacity to hear God clearly.
When we are tired and burned out,
we don't have the space we need both
mentally and physically to hear God speaking to us.

Most scholars see Elijah as discouraged,
suffering burnout from his ministerial (or prophetic) duties,
or even exhibiting signs of depression.

But one explains, “God’s therapy for prophetic burnout includes both the assignment of new tasks and the certain promise of a future that transcends the prophet’s own success or lack of it.

8 He got up and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mountain of God.

9 At that place he came to a cave and spent the night there.

God’s prescription for Elijah was to get him to a place where he would hear the voice of God soft and clear. What Elijah receives are practical, tangible provisions that are significant and strengthening that enable him to go **“in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights”**. Taking care of our body, mind, and soul is an act of worship. Getting rest and renewal and eating well: These are acts of worship. They grow our ability to hear God’s voice and to be in a space where that is possible.

Before last month, I had not taken an entire month off from my responsibilities as a pastor since 2017, and honestly, several things came up then that didn’t allow me to be entirely off. But this time I was.

I began my spiritual journey at St. Meinrad Archabbey

for three days, which was paid for by a well-being grant from the Conference, focusing on God and finding a sense of sabbath. And it reminded me of the need to get away more often to spend time with God.

When we think about renewal and resetting, we have to remember the power of sabbath,

that observing a sabbath is one of the ways God renews us. Sometimes we get so caught up in trying to change the world—Transforming the world, a worthy mission—that we keep going and going and going. Pretty soon, we are no longer operating under the power of God, and we begin to try to operate out of our own strength.

And life wears down even the best of us sometimes. If we allow our jobs and activities to work us into an early grave, then they will. No one will stop us. God knew about the need to rest,

finishing the work of Creation and then resting.
God blessed the seventh day and called it good.
What made it good? Rest.
An intentional, set-apart time to rest from work
and to rest in God's love is essential to a soul reset.
We've got to stop the hustle in order to let our hearts,
bodies, and minds find healing and wholeness.
And we have to consider how God has accompanied us on our journeys

Matthew 11:28

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest".

Jesus knew how to rest and went away to rest several times in the Gospels
And he invited his disciples and us into his rest Mark 6:31.
"Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."
He invited Martha to rest and renew at his feet with Mary.
He didn't say, "Come and let me give you a bunch of work to do."
He didn't say, "Follow me and you will have to-do lists like you've
never seen before."
No, Jesus said he gives us *rest*—rest for our whole selves.

Remember that God's salvation is for our whole selves:
God cares about our bodies, our minds, and our souls.
Sabbath is a must for our minds, bodies, and spirits to reset.
It is an essential ingredient for spiritual, emotional, and physical renewal.
A rested body will energize your life.
A rested mind is capable of creative thinking.
Our spirits need time to reconnect
to the source of our identity as children of God.
We are called to take care of ourselves.

Towards the end of my time,

I spent a couple of days with Hannah at a cabin at Center Hill Lake,
helping her find rest and renewal with everything
with her mom's cancer and celebrating her 22nd birthday on July 10.
It was a time of reconnection, a reminder of our bond.

God gave Elijah rest for the journey that
lay ahead of him and told him to eat something.
Elijah needed some rest and some food in order to
get back to the work set before him.
Sometimes God will have to attend to our physical needs
before encountering us.
because we are not ready to receive,

because we are just too worn out.
The key here is that God cared about Elijah's
physical well-being *and* his spiritual well-being.

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Just as Elijah, we need some time for self-inspection.
Not only do we need a sabbath, we need to move to Mt Horeb.
And ask if we are spiritually hydrated or dehydrated?
Sure, we've got all the marks of success:
We've got the reputation; we've got the title.
But success is a dangerous illusion.
Elijah says in 1 Kings 19:10, **"I am the only one left."**
Success tends to make you feel overly responsible
like everything rides on your strength and your strength alone.

This is the biggest thing I rediscovered during my rest and renewal:
I am not essential or necessary to the church's basic operation.
I might help it run smoother behind the scenes but I am not essential.
And that is ok. NFUMC went on without me.
However, I am needed, wanted, and hopefully valued
for what I bring to those basics when I am
at my best, serving God fully and faithfully.

But in sabbath, we lean into God's strength and remember

that God can do what God is going to do, with or without us.
Participating in God's work is God's gift to us, not a burden to bear. But an honor.
Not something to shove in or schedule in among our things.
1 Kings 19 challenges us to see how God was
present to us in the parts of our journey.
Elijah teaches us to bring all our emotions to God.
God will be present to us in different ways
on different parts of the journey
even when we feel anxious and alone.
Elijah's story assures us that God
makes the entire journey with us
as we move to Mt Horeb together.